

An Essay on
The Influence of Mind over Matter
Respectfully submitted to the
Faculty of the
Homoeopathic Medical College
of Pennsylvania.

on the
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one thousand eight hundred & fifty two.

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of Maine.

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The science of Medicine
has made such rapid strides
within the last few years, and
such unquestionable improvements,
that it would seem impossible to
suggest any new idea, or to devel-
op any new fact. But notwith-
standing the voluminous treatises
that have issued from the press in
all directions, an expansive veil
of obscurity still shrouds the ar-
cana of Nature and Disease, and
many are the secret and mysterious
objects which neither the mental
acumen nor the telescope of time
will ever be able to explain.
We witness disease in many forms
and varieties, and daily called up

on to administer to its aid and
obviate its ravages. In order that
the physician may faithfully
discharge his duty, it appears in-
cumbent on him to study well,
and understand the physical
changes produced by the operations
of the mind. In consideration
then, of the importance, which should
be, and is attached to such a course
of study, I have selected for my
subject in performance of a duty
assigned me, The Influence of
Mind over Matter, and inasmuch
as no part of the body is free from
mental operations, a wide and in-
teresting field is opened, which
my narrow limits will not permit

thoroughly to investigate, but only glance at a few general ideas.

Such is the intensity with which the mind acts on our corporeal structure, that it protracts the body, paralyzes the whole nervous system, and extinguishes ^{every} manifestation of life; or it may lay the foundation of distressing, protracted and incurable disease.

Knowing that the brain of man is his superiority over the whole of animated nature — the fountain of every manifestation of the mind — it becomes our imperative duty to study its material conditions in connexion with disease, as well as, to observe the mental derangements arising from

its impairment. It is not my purpose here to discuss the idle speculations of some, endowed with reasoning faculties and not afraid to exercise them, that the brain is not the material organ of the mind; nor have I any criticisms to offer concerning a certain school of Idealists, otherwise than quote an extract from Byron, who says;

When Bishop Berkeley said there was no matter
And proved it - 'Twas no matter what he said,

We see in tears but the liquid substance of grief or joy, emanating from the action of the mind on the lacrymal glands, under the influence of strong emotion. In violent palpitations of the heart, together with the tremor of the muscles in cases of sudden

excitement, we behold but the influence of the mind on the muscular fibre, and consequently on the circulating system through the medium of the nerves. Such examples as there come within the recent experience of every one - but to demonstrate how it is effected, baffles the skill of science, though investigation has given birth to many shrewd conjectures, and ingenious theories; the only one of which has been generally adopted, is that the nervous influence depends mainly on some modification of galvanism and electricity, and that substances which conduct electricity, are also conductors of the nervous fluid, and vice versa.

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The effects of fear on the human organism must be apparent to all. We are constantly summoned to witness the baneful consequences of this emotion on children; and perhaps more often on this class than any other, as their infantile nature seems more adapted to its operations; though no age is exempted. The blooming child of fond and affectionate parents, the object of their solicitude for years, and the cherished idol of their future hopes, often becomes the victim of distressing disease and death itself, from some inconsiderate folly on the part of its attendant. How many cases are on record, where mothers or nurses, ignorant of their own organisation, have endeavored to arrest the crisis of their

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little ones, by representing to their tender feelings, airy phantoms, shady ghosts, and huge monsters of every description the mind can conceive of, as the imagination fancy; and what is the result, often, too often, they soon find the child, whose cries they have indeed quieted, laboring under indigestion, fear, or derangement of the whole nervous system, which may speedily terminate in epilepsy, or lay the foundation of many evils in after life. Within the last few months I have had the opportunity to witness a case of epilepsy produced in a young girl, by some vicious boys telling her a ghost resided in a road through which she had lately passed. The

Public papers of this city have noticed several similar cases, as recently occurring in neighboring states; the most melancholy of which took place in Washington, where some young ladies, for their amusement, dressed one of their companions so as to represent a supernatural being, and conducted her to a room, where a girl was seated alone busily engaged in her studies. When the eyes of the unsuspecting girl met the unnatural figure, the whole system became immediately convulsed, and was only relieved from this undesirable condition, to emerge instantaneously into a state of raving mania. These cases are by no means uncommon; and the practice of parents resorting to

such means to procure the obedience of their children, or the young, forgetful amusement. playing such unpardonable tricks on their associates, cannot be too severely censured, both by the physician and teacher.

No duty has been more forcibly impressed, both by the moralist and the divine, than that of children to parents, and I would not say ought to lessen its deep and binding character, but really it appears to me that the duty of parents to children is of a paramount nature. We impose or bestow upon them life, and we should spare no pains, to render that life a blessing. If we through our culpable neglect, or mismanagement entail

upon them a host of bodily and mental ills, they owe us but little gratitude for the life with which we have burdened them.

Though the effects of fear, as we have demonstrated in the preceding, are of a dangerous character, yet of a much more alarming ^{nature} are results of long protracted grief, confined, as it generally is, to that portion of society around which, seems thrown a mantle of delicacy, to render them more susceptible to its operations.

Though the influence of grief, the spirits once so buoyant, are utterly dejected; the canker worm of care with slow and insidious progress eats into some vital organ, and, altering its

structure, and vitiating its functions, gradually undermines the fabric of the constitution, establishing a painful, incurable, and ultimately fatal disease. Says Sir Astley Cooper in one of his lectures, "grief is one of the most common causes of Cancer. It arrests the progress of secretion, produces irritative fever, and becomes the forerunner of scirrhus tubercles."

"How often," continues he, "when a mother has been watching night after night, with anxious solicitude, the pangs and suffering of her ^{child}, and has had the comfort and gratification of seeing its recovery, that in a short time after this she has come to me with cancerousness in her breast, which on exam-

irritation, I have found to be scirrhous
 tubercles. The mind acts on the body,
 the secretions are arrested, and the re-
 sult is formation of scirrhous. Full
 three fourths of these cases arise from
 grief and anxiety of mind. Look
 then, in this complaint, not only
 at altering the state of the constitu-
 tion, but relieve the mind, and re-
 move, if possible, the anxiety under
 which the patient labors.

Women, as is well known, are the
 peculiar victims of grief and nervous
 irritability; for their sensibilities being
 more refined, and their passions as strong
 or perhaps stronger than in man, but
 covered by that mantle of concealment,
 which nature hand in hand with

feminine modesty. Throws over them,
 the inward fire keeps slowly smoldering
 on, and secretly consuming the frail
 temperament in which it lies imbedded;
 they become the prey of grief and dis-
 appointment, robbing them of their
 required rest, destroying their appetite
 for food, and their enjoyment of pleas-
 ure, absorbing their every thought
 and finally, sapping even the citadel
 of reason itself. Hence arises his-
 teria in its many forms and fantas-
 tic shapes. The sympathetic palpi-
 tation of the heart is misconstrued
 into organic disease—the slight he-
 patic cough is converted by the im-
 agination into pulmonary phthis-
 is;—or the occasional giddiness of

the head, engenders an apprehension of apoplexy, or some fatal disease of the brain. Tortured by hypochondriacs, or frightened by the ghosts of fancied ills, such a person flies from one physician to another for advice; or beguiled by empirical puffs and baseless promises of cure, she becomes the dupe of quackery, and the martyr of imposture.

The patient, who despairs of recovery, is certainly in great danger, and the physician therefore who, by his countenance, or by his manner, can inspire the dreary vapor of hope, which is nearly extinguished, has gained an unquestionable advantage in the work of his vocation. The

patient studies his every word, weighs
his every turn of countenance, while
the mind becoming enlisted in the
service dispels the gloomy fears, which
oppress it. It becomes the duty of
the physician therefore, to infuse com-
solation, and inspire hope, where
he can so do, without compromis-
ing truth.

"Go seek the dismal chamber where disease
Reclines with wasted form and pallid hue;
Where through the half closed shutters sadly creeps
A feeble ray, that scarce a twilight sheds;
While all around distressing signs appear
Of fruitless remedies! Mark then how much
To lift the eye of hope upon a friend!
To feel upon the fluttering pulse the grasp
Of one beloved — it beats with firmer pace —

The languid eye beams momentary joy;
 And sickness, cheated by the smiling scene,
 Awhile forgets her pain inflicting task."

Erotic melancholy—grief arising
 from great political revolutions—
 produced by religious excitement—
 or following severe losses of fortune,
 is productive of the most serious
 consequences; and if long con-
 tinued ultimately terminates in
 that most lamentable condition
 of the human mind, known under
 the name of despair; where no ray of
 hope breaks in upon the ~~immense~~
 darkness of the soul.

The effect of anger on our
 bodily frame is perhaps no less still

ing, than those of fear and grief. Many cases are recorded where individuals have died under the influence of this passion; among which may be noticed the celebrated John Hunter, — dying in St. George's Hospital, from the irritation consequent on opposition to one of his motions at the weekly Board of its Governors.

Avarice, jealousy, ambition, envy, all have the same effects on the human body; and if long indulged in, totally derange all its functions. In all these cases, the mind acts powerfully on nature, and life speedily succumbs to its rigorous operations, or becomes ^{burdened} ~~as~~.

during a long protracted disease,

Heretofore. I have spoken of the operation of the mind in connection with disease, but may now notice for a moment its more salutary effects upon our physical structure,

Under the pleasant emotions of hope and joy moderately exercised, the organs of the body perform their functions in a healthy manner, giving lustre to the eye, freshness to the countenance, activity to the limbs, and altogether bespeaking contentment, happiness and health.

One thousand eight hundred and fifty two

by

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of Westfield New York